

Burn after playing

Written by dreamkatcha. Any related videos, as always, can be found on my YouTube channel.

None of this would have been possible without the fantastic resources generously provided by immensely talented emulator authors, and communities such as Hall of Light, Lemon Amiga, Lemon 64, World of Spectrum, Moby Games, World of Longplays and Recorded Amiga Games. Thank you for your tireless dedication to preserving the history of gaming.

Don't Breathe Now! is an obscure PD game developed by Mallory Breasal in 1989 as a thinly veiled, didactic 'anti-ode' to the everyday trials and tribulations faced by migraine aura sufferers.

You'll struggle to find the author's name or his creation listed in any of the usual Amiga software libraries. This is because the game was swiftly purged from consciousness by the powerful tobacco lobby groups who feared the catastrophic impact it would have on their lucrative industry. Discrediting Mallory's intentions, he was cast as a shill for 'big pharma', particularly those divisions of it specialising in licensed painkillers.

Mallory's unrecorded development softwareography ends there, and no-one has heard from him since. Some say he's keeping Nemo company, if you know what I mean.



Beside a long-since bypassed highway in an abandoned truckstop shack I met a shadowy figure known only as W. B. to get the low-down. Shrouded in mystery, and well, an *actual* hooded shroud, he leaned closer and spoke only in hushed tones. Phoneless and off-the-grid, anonymity was no mere preference; quite feasibly a survival mechanism.

This is the game *they* don't want you to play, brought to you by the blogger you wish would get a new hobby.

Taking the role of Undriya, a cryoconservation lab technician working for an organisation that specialises in the preservation and reanimation of schnauzers, the seemingly trivial aim of the game is to travel from your home town in Apocryphafeld to your ultra-crucial job in the city centre. Easier said than done when you're constantly exposed to all manner of migraine triggering olfactory assaults such as cigarette smoke, and food fumes being pumped profusely from takeaway and restaurant vents.

If the quirky plot doesn't prompt you to ask some probing follow-up questions, you must live in an extremely strange world. 'W. B.' helpfully elaborated:-

"It has been established through means of genetic analysis and canine soothsaying that schnauzers - given the opportunity - have the intellectual propensity to rule the free world and as furry lodestars save the human race from inevitable self-destruction.

The spanner in the works is that they don't possess opposable thumbs, can't talk (yet) and have also become an endangered species thanks to the current trend for people to favour designer pocket-dogs, Pugles, Chorkies, Yorkipoos, Pomsies, and Maltipoos.

To redress the balance you are tasked with freezing the remaining schnauzers to buy scientists time to develop bleeding-edge technology that will allow them to achieve their true potential, thereby emancipating the universe from inept human mismanagement.

The schnauzers are coming, and they're a formidable force for benevolent revolution... or *are* they?



Momentarily entranced by the indisputable logic, and blurring of nebulous lines between fact and fiction, I returned to the subject of mechanics.

Stepping off the bus, the streets immediately become an obstacle course littered with hazards. Inhale a plume of smoke and your brain fogs over, aphasia kicks in, your vision fractures into a thousand kaleidoscopic shards of multi-coloured light rays, and all semblance of control slips away from your paresthetic limbs.

Helpfully a blues-rock musical cue lets you know when you're heading for an ache...

"Cause' I'm a picker

I'm a grinner

I'm a lover

And I'm a sinner

Playin' my music in the sun

I'm a joker

I'm a smoker

I'm a mid-night toker

I sure don't want to hurt no one"

Of course, most situations can be improved with a bit of (Dave) Miller Time, but don't be lulled into letting your guard down for a second. This is when you're at your most vulnerable so paying close attention to any jittery characters emerging from nooks or crevices is what will keep you alive.



As for any kind of self-defence mechanism, your options are pretty limited. You can press the spacebar to hold your breath long enough to scurry past the doorway-hugging smokers. The problem is, as soon as you do, your oxygen-o-metre begins to drain, and as it depletes you become light-headed and less able to react swiftly. Hold your breath *too* long and you become dizzy, drifting helplessly into the road and into the path of oncoming traffic.

Splat! Mission failed. It's unforgiving in the extreme, much like the game of life.

The weaker opponents can be contained using your well-honed death-stare manoeuvre activated with the control key. That is, a precisely timed grimace will cause anyone shorter or more spindly than yourself to retreat back into the nearest

alley, out of harm's way. Use them sparingly as you only get three of them per level and they can't be replenished.

Strewn across the pavements are empty cigarette packets, their dire health warnings blithely dismissed as hyperbolic scaremongering. Gleefully crushing these underfoot elicits a satisfying crunch, a 'ker-ching!', and an accompanying boost in your finances. Don't look at *me*, that's arcade game logic for you. Sometimes it's best not to ask too many questions.



Cash can be exchanged for goods in retail outlets known as 'shops'. Now there's a novel concept! In this case, shops equate to pharmacies and all you can buy is the migraineur's favourite go-to confectionery, Ibuprofen, otherwise known as non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs.

These can be taken at will to top up your 'plot bar'. As you attempt to stumble from a to b, chowing down on carcinogens and the pungent stench of garlicky junk food, this gradually ebbs away until you finally lose it, and the game ends.

The FMV outro cut-scenes depict your avatar rocking back and forth, dribbling uncontrollably in an alcohol-free drunken stupor until you're swept into the back of an unmarked ambulance by the automatons in white coats.

Going insane is an awful nuisance - one way to combat it is to dip into the road temporarily to avoid smoke clouds, though care must be taken to re-mount the curb before the next stream of traffic pummels you into hedgehog mince. Playing chicken with HGVs is *also* bad for your health I'm told.

While they help, they're not a magic elixir, so go easy with the pill-popping or you'll find that another fun way to die involves in-suppressible gastric bleeding. Party time! Excellent!

Delving deep into the far reaches of the source code reveals a hidden cheat mode that removes the death-ticker bars, and allows you to call upon some pretty off-the-wall forms of backup. These 'engage' with the enemy by devouring them Rampage-style, or mowing them down at 88mph!



Another bizarre tweak to the standard gameplay mode is mobilised upon collecting a rain shower icon. The metropolitan vista shudders and a tribe of Maasai warriors spontaneously materialise from betwixt a purple mist. Decked in traditional Shuka garb they chant and perform the 'adumu' jumping dance that white men struggle so much to pull off, thereby eliciting a potent rainstorm that drives away the smokers.

In an alternative version, Willy Wonka emerges from a Cadbury's Creme Egg and compels *Chocolate* Rain to thunder down from the heavens as we are serenaded by the cheesy, ear-splittingly awful synthpop ballad of the same name.

Possibly these zany shenanigans detract from the sobering gravity of the underlying message, though there's no denying they're a welcome flicker of light relief in an otherwise heavy-going game.

If you can hold your ground in this urban battlefield long enough to reach your Final Destination, Death drops a grand piano on your drug-addled cranium, proving that no-one is immune to fate. When your time is up, your time is up. That's life, that's what all the people say.

They say everyone has *one* good game inside them. They also say "duck's quacks don't echo". *They* say a lot of things.

As for W. B., I'm still not entirely sure how to interpret his tall tale, or if my surreal encounter with this ephemeral entity actually took place at all.

Assuming he exists, you have to wonder why he's chosen to break ranks now after all this time. Was I being played like a violin? What agenda was he pushing? Was he working in isolation? Perhaps we'll never know.

Words fail me. Still, I'm not here to invent the news, only to report it.